

Culture Shock by 14winters

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Summary:

A collection of standalone ficlets, meta, and headcanons on Stoncy, initially posted to tumblr.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Work title is from the song by Olivia Newton-John - the lyrics talk about a polyamorous relationship.

God it just occurred to me that if you see Stoncy as happening in secret right before and through season 2 (which I do), that scene where Steve picks up Nancy and surprises her in the school hallway, and Jonathan just wordlessly walks away, totally still makes sense. Cuz Nancy and Jonathan have to pretend they're just friends and Steve, afraid of being thought gay, pretty much completely ignores Jonathan when they're at school. To them it's like a necessary evil.

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Also the reason Jonathan says "I have friends" when Will asks him "is that why you don't have any friends" is because he is actually dating his two best friends, Nancy and Steve, but he can't exactly tell Will that atm cuz Steve and him are understandably afraid of homophobia and Jonathan doesn't want to make his little brother who's already dealing with PTSD keep that kind of secret.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

If Stoncy wasn't canon before season 2 (which it is, I'm writing it) this is how I think things would go with the monster hunting trio drama (in a nutshell)

Disclaimer: this is messy af and I just wrote it quickly to make myself feel better

Between November 1983 and October 1984 (post season 1)

Steve defends her against any of their peers, especially Tommy and Carol, calling her a slut

Steve teams up with Jonathan without Nancy knowing to shut down the rumors that she "sleeps around" –which are mostly caused by the graffiti on the theater sign, but also Tommy and Carol being shitheads

Steve gets teased for being a cuckold and letting Nancy cheat on him, but he doesn't care, because he knows she didn't and he, Jonathan, and Nancy had a healthy discussion together about it and Steve knows the truth

Steve apologized to Nancy repeatedly about the theater sign. He accepted that she needed space in the weeks after they fought the monster. Nancy still loved him, but she was hurting and confused and grief-stricken, both about Barb and for having feelings for Jonathan, and also hurt that Jonathan seemed to be ignoring her

When Nancy finally tells Steve she forgives him and she wants to be with him, Steve can't believe his luck. He knows he doesn't deserve

her forgiveness, but selfishly he's so grateful to have her back. He knows from that day on he'll do anything for Nancy, and he'll always love her.

It's the beginning of December, the week before finals. For days after they're officially together again, Nancy just cries with Steve in his car after school, unable to talk about Barb, agonizing over not being able to tell Barb's parents. Steve doesn't know what to say, but he always holds her as she cries and tells her she can tell him anything.

Nancy never cries around Steve, or anyone, after that week. Her guilt is so great that she barely speaks about Barb from that point. She tells herself Steve doesn't deserve to be constantly reminded of it, it's not his fault she chose to send Barb away that night. She quietly punishes herself, for months, agonizing over what she can do.

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Between October 1984 and January 1985 (during and post-season 2)

After Steve tells her in the library to act like everything is okay, to go to the Halloween party and act like a stupid teenager, she resolves to do just that. She tells herself Steve is right, she can't expect that he would agree with her that they should tell Barb's parents. But there's a quiet anger in her chest that she's afraid to acknowledge.

The night of the party, after Jonathan takes Nancy home, he decides to lie to Nancy if she asks about what happened tonight. He knows what it's like to feel guilt over losing someone. Nancy doesn't deserve to lose Steve over this, no matter what she said to Steve at the party.

After their argument in the alley, Nancy is afraid to go after Steve. She runs what he said through her mind, over and over, what she said to him when she was drunk. Words she can't even remember, but the way Steve said them, they sound so eerily familiar. They're things she's told herself on the worst nights, when the nightmares

wake her, when the insomnia keeps her awake. She'd told herself so many times she didn't deserve Steve, she didn't deserve anything, because Barb was dead and she wasn't. And she couldn't tell anyone what it felt like to lose her best friend. She couldn't talk to Steve about it anymore because it just would hurt both of them.

"We killed Barb." She hated herself for saying that to him. Steve had done nothing wrong but love her. But how could she deserve his love after this? She had been tired of pretending, she couldn't anymore. But she had never pretended to love Steve. But was her love for him wrong? Did her love for Steve kill Barb? Was it even love? Was it just her guilt? She didn't know. She didn't know anymore. That's why she couldn't answer him when he said "tell me that you love me". He didn't understand. She didn't know because Barb's death was always at the front of her mind, shadowing everything else. She'd tried to act, for so long she tried to act like it was all fine, that Barb wasn't dead. But it was a lie. She couldn't separate lies from truth anymore.

The anger returns full force. Against herself, against Steve, against the lab. The lab. It's all their fault. She'd lost Barb because of them. She'd lost Steve because of them. She has to do something. Steve was right. She was bullshit. But she was going to change that.

The night at Murray's, Nancy keeps thinking "*I don't retreat*. I retreated with Steve, I pushed him away because of *my* guilt, but I *will* confront these feelings for Jonathan. I won't hide them like I did with Steve and let them hurt me anymore," and in the back of her mind she repeats "do I love Steve? Why would Murray think I don't love him? Why would I pretend to love someone? Was I pretending?" and she has to keep shoving the questions down because she has to prove something to herself, and keep reassuring herself that their plan will work, that the lab will fucking burn to the ground and Barb's parents will know at least part of the truth.

She and Jonathan don't have sex. She kisses him for the longest time and fights back tears. And finally she tells him. She tells him as much as she can about what has been on her mind since that stupid

argument in the alley. How she can't stop thinking she's been lying to herself this whole time, about loving Steve, about blaming Steve for her pain that night at the party and not meaning to. She misses Steve, but she missed Jonathan too and she hates herself for it.

And Jonathan rubs her back and says he's sorry over and over, telling her he was an asshole for not talking to her after Will came back. And he promises he'll help her sort everything out with Steve. Even if Steve won't accept her apology, even if he doesn't understand, Jonathan will be there to support her when she talks to Steve, if she wants him to.

So after the gate is closed, Jonathan goes with Nancy to talk to Steve. Nancy tells Steve everything she's been feeling, been holding back, how she was confused and guilt-ridden but she shouldn't have taken that out on Steve. And she tries to say she wasn't pretending to love him, she would never pretend to love him. But that morning in the alley she was afraid to lie to him, because she didn't know what she felt anymore.

And she breaks down crying in front of both boys, crying in front of others for the first time in months, and confesses that she loves both of them and doesn't know what to do.

And Jonathan and Steve hug her and Steve looks at Jonathan and says "It'll be okay, Nance. I love you too."

And they start a poly relationship with each other and live HEA

3. Chapter 3

Notes for the Chapter:

Nancy Wheeler behind the scenes, post-season 1

You know why I see Nancy as polyamorous, in love with both Steve and Jonathan? Not just because the canon doesn't disprove it. But because she struggles with her emotions so realistically. In season 1 she just wants to be with a cute guy she likes, and everyone, *everyone* judges her for it. And when Barb disappears, and then she learns Barb is dead, she feels like all those people who judged her were justified. But they weren't. She lets her guilt over Barb's death dictate which of her actions are okay or not, and that's wrong. She shouldn't have felt like that. But there was no one to tell her otherwise, because she couldn't talk to anyone about Barb's death.

Except Steve. Steve didn't judge her like she felt everyone else was, because he loved her. She felt his love for her every day. He wanted to be around her, even though he knew about Barb's death. She must have confided in him, at least in the beginning, before she shut her pain away and tried to pretend everything was okay, even to Steve.

Her guilt only becomes tenfold when she thinks about her feelings for Jonathan. Jonathan, who barely talks to her, because Steve is usually with her when they see each other at school. In season 2 she says he "disappeared", and he tells her he was taking care of Will, and mentions Steve. So she says she waited. He says she didn't wait long enough. And just like that, the guilt must have piled on her again. She was more afraid than she'd ever been at that time in her life, after they fought the monster in 1983. Steve had hurt her, and Jonathan avoided her. She was forced to never reveal Barb had died, and couldn't grieve. Faced with the challenge of keeping that secret without breaking down, why wouldn't she let Steve back in her life? Steve had wanted to make things right, that night at Jonathan's, and she knew he'd meant it. He probably came to her first, the day she returned to school after Will came back, and apologized. And she told him she needed time, and of course he gave it to her.

And for the “like, a month” she waited for Jonathan, she was agonizing over what to do. We don’t know exactly what happened by Nancy saying Jonathan “disappeared” and she “waited”. How often did they talk? How often did Nancy check on him? What did Jonathan do to make her think he didn’t even want to be friends with her? He must have avoided her at school, even when Steve wasn’t with her. Anyone, especially a 16 year old, can only stand rejection so many times before they give up. Nancy “waited” for Jonathan to show her he at least wanted to be friends with her. But instead he “disappeared”. You can’t be friends with someone and “disappear” at the same time. Either he acted like he wanted to spend time with her, or he “disappeared”. We know which one it was. His lack of response had to have made Nancy assume he still judged her for being with Steve. She still hadn’t told Steve she was comfortable dating him, but they would still spend time together at school, at lunch, studying in the library. She saw Jonathan avoid her and thought “he must still dislike Steve, even though Steve was willing to apologize that night”. And by thinking this she would think Jonathan still judged her for spending time with someone like Steve, someone he knew had slut shamed her, and said horrible things to Jonathan. And so she stopped waiting, because why would she want to be friends with someone who still judged her? She would recall their argument in the woods, when he was still upset about Steve breaking his camera, and what Steve had said to Jonathan when he thought she’d cheated on him.

So Nancy had a choice. Try to communicate with Jonathan, who she thought didn’t want to talk to her because she was still spending time with Steve. Or get back with Steve, someone she knew loved her, and who she could talk with about Barb without fear of being judged, like she feared Jonathan was judging her.

Miscommunication happens between people all the time, *especially* when you’re a teenager. On top of having feelings for two boys, Nancy had to deal with the guilt of her friend’s death that she couldn’t fully confront, because that death had to be kept secret. Her feelings were not clear cut in this situation. How could they be? She has a friend’s death on her conscience, she can only confide in Steve, and she has no idea why Jonathan was avoiding her and she’s afraid to communicate with him. She already knew she cared about Steve and he cared about her. They probably hadn’t even said they

loved each other yet, they'd only just started dating days (maybe two weeks?) before the events of 1x08.

Nancy and Jonathan had obviously had a connection, and been at least acquaintances before the events of season 1, because their brothers were friends. But after Will came back, Jonathan "disappeared" to Nancy. She must have believed he wanted things to return to the way they'd been, to them just being acquaintances. So that's what she let happen.

It was so understandable when Murray's stupid lecture and condescension got under her skin and she decided to act. She was likely thinking, I'm sick of feeling guilty for not doing what anyone wants. I can't pretend for Steve, I can't communicate with Jonathan, I can't stop blaming myself for Barb's death, I can't pretend she's not dead. And now Steve thinks I don't love him. But I can do something with Jonathan, now.

We don't know what she was thinking about Steve after El closed the gate. The show didn't give us *anything*, except Steve's understanding of her choosing Jonathan, and the look of pain on Nancy's face when he said "It's okay". Because Jonathan supported her in her vengeance for Barb when Steve told her they were powerless to do anything. Steve realizes he was wrong to tell Nancy that.

But what does Nancy realize? Why does the fandom think she just left Steve without saying anything to him? A month passes between their short conversation just before El closes the gate, and the Snow Ball, where we don't even get to see them talk to each other, or Nancy talk to Jonathan, because all the focus is on the party and Mike and Eleven.

Why is it so unbelievable that she and Steve reconciled after their conversation in 2x08, in the days after El closed the gate? Why would anyone think she's incapable of apologizing just because this stupidly formatted show doesn't have enough runtime to give all its main characters equal emotional attention?

4. Study Sessions

Notes for the Chapter:

Headcanons for studying that also becomes headcanons for sleepovers at the Byers' house.

Steve's place is usually the safest, because Steve always knows when his parents won't be home and they can all come over. But they seldom get any actual studying done at Steve's house. Jonathan's house is the most productive place to do anything. And until Nancy and Jonathan finish high school, Joyce is the only person who knows about their poly relationship. Everyone else thinks Nancy is only dating Jonathan, and Steve's parents don't care where he goes. Most of the time Steve doesn't even tell his parents where he's going, because they're usually not around to care.

Steve loves helping his gf and bf study for tests, as we already saw with him and Nancy in season 1. Steve also loves not having to climb in through the window, and Joyce always makes Nancy and Steve feel welcome. She really becomes a second mother to them. Nancy spends long and longer evenings at the Byers, and in the beginning Karen wouldn't let her spend the night, always wanting her home by 10, 9 on school nights. But after enough conversations between Karen and Joyce, Karen finally consented, as long as Joyce was home. Nancy was beyond thrilled. Every Friday at least, if Steve's parents are in town, she and Steve spend the night at the Byers. Steve's parents know he's friends with Jonathan, but they haven't even met Jonathan and don't know Jonathan is dating Nancy. Steve doesn't volunteer that information.

Friday night sleepovers at the Byers are usually spent watching a movie in the living room after homework is *mostly* done (Nancy is very strict they do *some* of it so they can relax Sunday), sometimes with Joyce and Will, sometimes not. Joyce lets them drink if they want. Their favorite times are in the spring and summer, when Joyce sits with them on the porch and the four of them all share a joint.

Steve and Nancy, when they first started sleeping over at the Byers, would sleep out in the living room, Nancy on the couch and Jonathan

and Steve on the floor in a mix of sleeping bag and several duvets. Once Jonathan and Nancy both fell asleep on the couch accidentally and Steve fell asleep on the floor. Nancy woke up in the middle of the night from a nightmare, and all three of them ended up on the floor, because Nancy refused to go back to sleep unless they were both beside her.

Soon enough though Joyce has a healthy discussion with them about safe sex (because cmon she's the Cool Weed Mother™ don't argue) and although Jonathan has to be high for this conversation, they all agree that as long as Nancy gets on birth control and they use condoms, Joyce doesn't care if they have sex in her house. (fuck the sneaking around bullshit *pounds fist* I want my ot3 and their Weed Mother to have HEALTHY COMMUNICATION GDI) After this conversation Nancy and Steve and Jonathan all sleep in Jonathan's room during sleepovers. At first with the door open, but as time goes on they get comfortable closing it. They never have sex when anyone is home. Nancy refuses for one because it makes her uncomfortable. Steve is fine as long as after everyone goes to bed they can shut the door and have some sort of skin to skin contact (underwear optional, though Nancy and Jonathan take some convincing on that part in the beginning).

Nancy is usually in the middle, but sometimes Steve spoons Jonathan who spoons Nancy. Nancy is the only light sleeper, but her insomnia is so bad she doesn't care if the boys' tossing and turning wakes her up.

Jonathan usually prefers to do homework alone but Nancy and Steve are his exceptions. Nancy is the most disciplined so she'll usually sit between Steve and Jonathan in Jonathan's room while they study. If Steve gets impatient or either of them want to take breaks too often (usually to make out and/or get Nancy's shirt off) she threatens to move their studying out to the living room—and she refuses to take her bra off for the rest of the evening. She's gone through with this threat before so the boys know to take her at her word. Nancy is a very good negotiator and Steve's grades have actually improved since he's started studying with her—so since after winter break ended in January 1984. Also, both Jonathan and Steve find Nancy's presence a *great* motivator to get their homework done.

Nancy and Jonathan always have the same tests coming up at the same time, so Steve gets to test both of them. Most of the time this ends up with Steve being naked, Jonathan with only boxers on, and Nancy still wearing her skirt/pants, bra, and shirt (she only had to take off her sweater/cardigan and socks).

Steve struggles with most subjects except gym, and though he doesn't like writing, he loves reading. Jonathan hates math. Nancy loves math and science, but doesn't have a lot of patience with history.

So Nancy usually helps Steve plan out his essays, and both she and Jonathan help him proofread. Nancy helps both boys with math if they're struggling, which Jonathan usually is. Jonathan helps Nancy and Steve with any memorizing most of the time, he has a great memory and finds studying the easiest. Jonathan loves reading anything, and enjoys history and literature. If he finishes his homework before the others, of course he takes out his camera and sneaks a shot here and there.

Usually he gets Nancy biting her lower lip, or laughing at something Steve said. One of Jonathan's favorite pictures is of Steve shirtless and Nancy in her bra and skirt, both sitting on his bed, laughing at each other while flashcards lay scattered between them. And his favorite pose for Steve is him lying down, his hair messier than usual, but of course still sexy somehow. Once Jonathan caught Steve and Nancy napping together on his bed, after Jonathan had just gotten back from the store. Nancy had her head pillowed on Steve's chest, and the setting sun was hitting them just right. It took Jonathan weeks to show that picture to them, because he treasured it so much.

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Nancy loves when they all get to have sleepovers and she gets up first bc she and Joyce get to chat over coffee and Nancy helps with breakfast and then she gets to wake up her bfs however she wants and Jonathan is so fun to wake up bc he's usually the first one up so when he realizes Nancy is waking him up he has a mini freak out moment and forgets what day it is and where he is and Nancy kisses him senseless making him forget his name too.

Then Nancy and Jonathan wake up Steve and this is much more

difficult but more fun for that. Steve is the heaviest sleeper any of them have ever seen. Nancy loves to tickle his feet. He doesn't wake up but he kind of giggles sleepily and it makes her and Jonathan laugh. Jonathan will push Steve to the middle of the bed onto his back if he isn't already, then kneel over him, framing Steve's hips with his thighs. And he'll just play with Steve's hair. Steve loves when either of them play with his hair, he practically hums with happiness.

So when he's asleep he kind of starts to wake up when Jonathan plays with his hair and Nancy will lie beside him and tickle his neck and kiss his cheek and collarbone and shoulder and eventually Steve will open his eyes super slowly and mumble at them, usually something like "Jonathan is that Nancy's gun in your pants or are you just happy to see me?" And they all burst out laughing.

5. Chapter 5

Notes for the Chapter:

Stoncy and being tactile

It's all but confirmed by fandom that Steve is the most tactile of the trio. He loves casual touch. This is proven by the canon. We always see Steve touch Nancy first. He makes the first move. It's implied that he began interacting with Nancy first, not the other way around. He puts a note in her locker to meet him in the bathroom. After he breaks Jonathan's camera, he puts his arm around her. In the hallway after this he rubs her leg in a comforting gesture.

In season 2 he kisses her first after their conversation in his car. He picks her up in the hallway, and the glee on his face and the way Nancy reacts shows this has likely happened dozens of times before, and Nancy is receptive to it.

Then there's Jonathan, the supportive older brother who pretty much had to become a co-parent to Will. We see Joyce, Will, and Jonathan hug each other readily. But when we see Jonathan hug Will, it's always with Joyce there as well. I don't think Jonathan initiates touch very much at all. But having a mother like Joyce taught him that showing her, and showing Will, his love through touch was important. With other people it takes much longer for him to feel comfortable with touch. He'd prefer to keep his distance, unless extremely provoked, like we see with his father Lonnie and Steve in season 1. We know from the canon that Lonnie physically abused Jonathan. Jonathan had a reputation for being a creeper, so much so that a rumor spread that he killed his own brother. So when Steve brought all this bullshit up he lashed out to defend his *family*. Just like he must've had to defend Will from Lonnie.

Jonathan is the one who will start a fight to protect, to ensure neither Steve nor Nancy have to fight. But when possible he stops a fight from even starting (such as when he drags Nancy and Steve away from the demogorgon in 1x08).

Nancy is the least tactile, but Steve and Jonathan become her

exceptions. She grew up with very little touch between her and her parents. She can't remember the last time Ted hugged her. Karen is good at comforting, but while we see Karen physically comfort Mike in season 1, Nancy doesn't allow Karen to do the same to her. There is a noticeable distancing between mother and daughter that Nancy likely instigated. She's the type of person where if you don't earn her trust, she wants nothing to do with you. Karen lost her trust after a point in Nancy's early teens, and never got it back.

When Steve and Nancy began dating, Nancy ate up his touch like it was ambrosia. She never could get enough, but for weeks she didn't know how to initiate. She could say she was shy with him, but it was a certain kind of fear. She'd wanted to have sex with him, so she had. It was the casual touches that were difficult. He made it seem so easy—he would reach out to her as if it was second nature to him. So she slowly, very slowly, tried to do the same. It was scary for her. She started with just reaching for his hand, then going in for a kiss first when they kissed hello and goodbye. Steve would smile bigger, and she knew she was doing something right.

When they both secretly began including Jonathan as part of a strange new relationship, not knowing there was a word for it—polyamory—Jonathan was much harder for Steve to read. They were wary with each other at first. It was Nancy that had brought this new relationship into being—they both cared for her, but there was no jealousy. Just wariness. Eventually she got the three of them together and made them all talk about it. That's what she was good at, making herself and others do difficult things.

For Steve, it wasn't that he hated his attraction to other boys. For Jonathan, it wasn't that he couldn't accept he was attracted to Steve. It was that Steve was used to initiating with girls, only girls. He knew how to read them. He had no idea how to read boys, how to read Jonathan.

And it was that Jonathan never initiated touch with anyone, not even his own family. He always let them make the first move. Unless it was defending himself from Lonnie, defending others (Will, Joyce, Steve, Nancy). He'd never been close to anyone outside his family, Will and his mom. Being with Nancy was far more than he'd ever known. But all of them knew what a relationship between a man and

a woman looked like. Being with Steve felt the same, except without a precedent. There was just raw attraction between them, nothing to guide them.

So Nancy had to do something scary—again—and help them take that first step. She makes sure Steve or Jonathan is in the middle, instead of herself, much more often. She's very vocal about how beautiful they are together. It doesn't happen overnight. In the beginning, more often than not, alcohol and weed is incorporated into their late nights alone together. But the more often they are all relaxed together, the more Steve and Jonathan are relaxed with each other. And eventually, Nancy never has to say anything about letting one of her boyfriends be in the middle. They take turns.

6. Spooning

Steve is the little spoon and loves it. He loves when Nancy spoons him because she's so much smaller than him and yet so strong he feels this wonderful mix of protected and protective. Also he loves the feeling of Nancy's arms around him, he'll never get tired of it as long as he lives. She holds you like not even a hurricane could take you away from her. Not too tight, but she doesn't shy away from showing how much she wants him close. Steve never gets enough of that feeling. And she smells wonderful even when they're all bruised and sweaty from monster hunting, mostly because she's female and uses the most wonderful shampoo that smells like flowers and something heady that always makes him lightheaded in the best way. He can never guess what it is, even her shampoo bottle doesn't say.

And he loves when Jonathan spoons him because Jonathan knows how to hug like nobody's business. Steve can tell Jonathan has had to comfort his little brother in bed plenty of times, because he can hold you both gently and with this quiet certainty that nothing can harm you—a mix of softness and strength both the same and different from Nancy's. Jonathan also loves to run his fingers all over his boyfriend and girlfriend, just the tips in that way that makes pleasurable chills go all through you, and he knows exactly where their most sensitive spots are. For Steve it's over his ribs and upper arms. For Nancy it's her thighs and lower back. Jonathan doesn't even do it to get anything from them, he just loves touching them like that and seeing the looks on their faces.

Nancy loves feeding her boyfriends. Not just cooking for them, but literally feeding them. It started out as her stubbornly wanting Jonathan to eat more, but not wanting to embarrass him. So she made it fun. The first time it was with an apple pie she'd helped her mother make. The three of them were in the Wheeler dining room and everyone else had gone to bed. Steve had snuck in through the basement and they were all talking quietly, eating pie and sipping a cheap champagne Nancy had found buried in the pantry earlier in the week and wanted to share with them.

Jonathan had had dinner no later than 3:30pm, before his shift at work, and it was now nearly 2am. He ate one piece of pie and said he was full. Nancy called bullshit, but only with her expression. Steve and Jonathan could tell she was displeased. She went and sat in Jonathan's lap, a plate of pie in her hand, and said, "I'll take off my shirt if you take a bite of this," and held a forkful of pie in front of his mouth. Jonathan saw Steve grinning behind Nancy, saw the determined set of Nancy's jaw, and knew he couldn't say no. He never forgot the taste of apple, cinnamon, and champagne on Nancy's lips from that night.

7. Strengths

Steve knows some men think skinny women are too bony and uncomfortable to have sex with. But he doesn't see Nancy that way at all. She's a small wildcat in bed, all nails and soft lips, moaning and screaming readily for him, even at the slightest touch. She's so sensitive it drives *him* insane the closer they get to orgasm together.

Jonathan is different, Steve doesn't know any other man like he does Jonathan. There's no precedent. Steve just revels in everything Jonathan is—his messy hair, his soft, perceptive eyes, his gentle but sure hands, whether he's touching a person or his camera. He's submissive in bed, but his strength still comes out. How he looks directly into Steve's eyes, does exactly what Steve orders immediately and with complete trust.

His understanding and acceptance of Steve, of everything he is, makes Steve weak, but weak in a way he knows his love for Jonathan can never be shaken. He's never felt closer to anyone than he does to Jonathan.

Nancy is open and understanding to everyone, in a genuine way that no one could ever doubt. She's a skilled liar, but only to those she mistrusts—her mother, for instance. When she accepts you she accepts everything about you, never judges. This is how it was when they began dating. Steve couldn't get enough of her because she just took him, all of him, without hesitation. Her teasing was never malicious, her smiles were always real, her happiness with him a tangible thing. She lies to protect, either herself or someone else. Him. He thought she'd betrayed him when really she just wanted him safe. They were alike in that way—going so far to protect someone that they would take any damage to themselves, no matter the cost.

That's why Nancy couldn't get over Barb. She'd failed, in a moment of selfishness, failed her best friend, and lost her. No chance to mend her mistake. Steve couldn't understand the loss, he just wanted her pain to be gone. They learned the hard way that to truly heal each other they had to follow each other's rules. And they never forget.

Nancy knows Steve doesn't need words most of the time. His pain can

be soothed with more kisses and far less sentences. Steve knows Nancy needs to talk, to scream, to ramble, before she can move past her pain. And then she must punish someone. Herself, or the ones responsible. There's not third choice for her.

Jonathan's pain is different than both of theirs. He's quiet, but unlike Steve, he doesn't need to be touched. He just needs someone to be there, to tell him it will get better, that it isn't his fault. Only then will he open up again, in the subtle way that is uniquely Jonathan. He gives far too much, never taking enough. He'll reach out for your hand, pressing a kiss to your fingers, your cheek, your shoulder. He receives by giving, gives by giving.

Steve and Jonathan tell her Nancy gives by taking, but it's not a selfish taking. Nancy couldn't understand, so they showed her.

Steve kissed her until she was breathless, then kissed her until she was weak and breathless, and begging for his lips to return, he on her knees above her, holding her face in his hands. Jonathan stroked her breasts, shoulders, back, his hands warm and light. He kissed Nancy's neck at the same time Steve kissed her mouth and Nancy felt the most intoxicating mix of need and over-stimulation, she was truly mindless with ecstasy.

Steve's giving was more direct, forceful, but no less perfect. He used words like a finely sharpened knife. He knew exactly when to tease and when to wound, or to torment. Against Jonathan and Nancy, his words were always pain laced with pleasure—giving them the image they wanted, but without sensation. Nancy would later tell him he was the most skilled with words of anyone she'd ever met, and he didn't believe her.

So she explained, "You don't need to write anything down to make your words powerful. Your words are always beautiful, because your mind is so observant and quick. It shows when you talk to us the way you do."

Jonathan's gift was visual. Nancy's physical. Jonathan could capture the world, reality, like no one else could. He saw immediately what everyone else took too long to notice, and photographed it. And Nancy was the most powerful in spirit, and this came through in her

body. What she did not have in size, she made up for in cunning and the strength of her anger. She could take anyone by surprise because she had grown up acting as prim and quiet as everyone expected her to be. So when she chose to fight, no one saw her coming.

8. Chapter 8

Nancy loves feeding her boys. I've gone about this before but she does. When the three of them gather at the Byers', she and Joyce kick Jonathan out of the kitchen (he's cooked far more meals in Joyce's absence than he admits) and Nancy and Joyce plan a meal together. The first meal Nancy got to cook with Joyce for Steve, Jonathan, and Will, was spaghetti. Joyce shared her grandmother's recipe and Nancy felt so much warmth and acceptance from Joyce she was near tears through most of dinner.

Steve loves picking them up and carrying them around for no reason. His favorite thing to do between classes is try to give Nancy a piggy back ride to her next class, regardless of her protests that he's going to be late for his.

Jonathan isn't a very athletic person, but he loves swimming. The first time Steve sees Jonathan in his swim trunks he's unable to speak for a few minutes. He almost stumbles over himself when Jonathan shyly asks him to rub sunscreen on his back. And Nancy puts sunscreen on Steve's back at the same time, playing connect the dots with his freckles.

Nancy is the angriest and most protective person Jonathan and Steve have ever met, save for Joyce. Jonathan can understand being protective, he's felt the same way about his brother since Will was born, but he thinks Nancy is making up for lost time, and her grief over Barb's death is very much part of it. The few times anyone has dared target Jonathan and Steve with homophobic slurs with Nancy around, someone's gotten a bloody nose or a black eye, and it was never Nancy, Steve, or Jonathan. Nancy also carries her gun around everywhere, and is fond of just hitting people with it if they try to start a fight. Or she lets Steve do the hitting, since he's the tallest and some of their antagonists are often too tall for Nancy to reach the top of their head.

The first time Nancy landed in the hospital it was because of monster hunting. They had to blame the injuries on a mugging or a hit and run, Steve and Jonathan got their stories crossed once they got to the hospital, their voices overlapped, Steve already sobbing

uncontrollably, Nancy's blood all over his hands. Jonathan did most of the talking, until Hopper got there. Hopper helped them escape any other police asking further questions. Nancy was bedridden for a few days and whenever she was awake she was telling Jonathan and Steve over and over again how they did nothing wrong, how it was all her mistakes that got her injured, and eventually begging them to get in the hospital bed with her because she missed them. It was a tight fit but they made it work. The nurses tried to protest this and Nancy was very firm, without using any curse words, that they had no right to take her boys from her and she would scream bloody murder if they tried. Hopper again had to intercede to keep the hospital staff from taking further action.

The first thing Nancy did after getting out of the hospital was to ask Steve to carry her upstairs to her bed, and for Steve and Jonathan to sleep beside her. She'd never slept so much since before Barb's disappearance, and it scared her to wake up alone. Mike helped Jonathan set up the basement TV in her bedroom so she could watch her favorite VHS tapes without having to go up and down two flights of stairs. Ted tried to get in an argument with the boys about putting Nancy in danger, but Mike shut his father down before Jonathan and Steve said very much. Mike pretty much said, "You never cared about Nancy when she was healthy and out of the house all the time. She's nineteen now and you can't do a damned thing to control her. And you know if you throw Jonathan and Steve out she'll just leave with them to stay at Mrs. Byers'. Sit the fuck down." Steve hugged Mike for a full minute afterwards, and Mike hadn't seen Jonathan so close to tears since that night at the hospital in November 1983 when he saw Will alive. Jonathan hated crying around other people, except Nancy and Steve.

9. Chapter 9

Steve finds it the most difficult to express his emotions. He can communicate other things just fine - especially if it has to do with how much he loves Nancy and Jonathan, telling them how beautiful they are to him, exactly what he wants to do to them behind closed doors - *those* things are easy for him to voice. But when it comes to his deeper feelings, he'd prefer fighting another demodog.

So Nancy is the most perceptive about this. The months she only dated Steve, she learned he had to feel he was helping you before he'd say anything about what he needed. So when she sensed he was upset about something, she'd try to get him to confess what was bothering him by complaining about things that bothered her - sometimes trivial, sometimes not. And she'd ask him for advice, and usually that would get him to talk about his own darker feelings. Usually it was about his triggers, or a reoccurring nightmare, or something to do with his attraction to guys, which he took months to really talk about at all. Rarely it had to do with her, but when it did she always reassured him he could tell her anything. Eventually he actually believed it.

When Jonathan and Steve become closer, Jonathan is less direct about approaching Steve's reticence to voice what's bothering him. They have a lot of comfortable silences. Usually just cuddling on Jonathan's bed listening to tapes. Jonathan isn't as subtle as Nancy, mostly because he never had to learn the social art of subtlety. He just starts talking about the most random things, usually a story about his family, especially Will, sometimes Lonnie. And doesn't hesitate to ask Steve how he's feeling. It's just how Jonathan is wired - he always pays more attention to what others are feeling, what others need, over himself. Jonathan also finds Steve easy to talk to. As soon as they started to know each other more, they realized there was just this natural closeness developing between them, seemingly out of nowhere. They sensed a kindred spirit in each other, even though they're so different from an outside perspective. Jonathan is drawn to Steve's mask of fearlessness, a certain type of courage that Jonathan struggles with, and Steve is drawn to Jonathan's confidence, and the quiet emotional strength he has. They feed off

each other's strengths without even realizing it.

10. Monster Hunting Trio and The Party

Contrary to that popular McDonald's post (where Nancy only orders a coffee for herself) I think Nancy is a pretty cool person to be around. Dustin would probably jump off a cliff for her at this point. They all know she's badass - Max was filled in for sure by Dustin and Lucas.

After El comes back, Mike and Nancy become much closer. "We tell each other everything" are no longer the empty words Nancy said on impulse when she still had hope Barb would come back and everything would return to normal.

But now Nancy is the most at peace she's ever going to be about Barb, in her view. Now that it's not a secret that Barb is dead, she feels less like she's living in a prison in her own mind. She and El get along unexpectedly well (unexpected in Mike's view anyway). But El finds Nancy the least intimidating to talk to. Nancy hasn't been through abuse like El or Kali, but she knows what it's like to carry a darkness inside you that never goes away. And Nancy has a gentleness to her that El is drawn to, both as an abuse survivor and a young girl. El spends most of her time with Mike and the rest of the party of course, but she always makes a point to visit Nancy in her room and they just talk. Nancy offered to paint El's nails once, and didn't act horrified or embarrassed when El didn't know what that meant. El loves that about Nancy - she never overreacts to things or treats El like she's going to break. She is just as easy to be around as Mike.

Dustin never tells anyone that Nancy said she was his favorite. But he secretly feels special when Nancy comes over to his house with Steve and/or Jonathan, and Mrs. Henderson cooks for all of them. Nancy ends up giving all the boys better advice about dating and talking to girls. She only does this one-on-one with Mike, when her brother is anxious about a situation with El.

But with Lucas and Dustin, she takes them under her wing, especially after Steve told her what he told Dustin. She gives more nuanced advice than Steve. Lucas usually comes to Nancy when Max is upset and he doesn't know why, or how to find out without making things worse (which he's done once already and doesn't want to do again).

She immediately dispels the myth that girls are “too complicated” or say what they don’t mean just to confuse boys. After her advice helped him make up with Max, Lucas never doubted Mike’s sister again.

Max usually only sees Nancy when El is also with her. She finds Nancy pretty intimidating at first. She’d never met a girl who knew how to shoot a gun before. Nancy senses Max’s shyness and offers to teach Max and El when she goes out for shooting practice with Hopper one day. El mostly watches (and Max knows her friend is helping her hit the targets with her gift at first), but Max is really into it. The three girls sometimes have girls’ nights, where Nancy gives Max and El manicures and pedicures and they watch a romantic movie the boys wouldn’t sit through. Nancy is the first person Max tells about her attraction to girls, because she sensed Nancy had feelings for Kali (hint of my ot4, forgive me please).

Jonathan is closest to his brother Will, of course, but everyone in the party has long known he was trustworthy. Mike’s earliest memory of Jonathan is watching the elder brother comfort a 7 year old Will after Lonnie had made him cry. They were playing outside and Lonnie had yelled something at Will, Mike could never remember what. And in seconds Jonathan was there, holding his little brother while he cried. Jonathan had only been 11 years old then. From that day on Mike knew he could trust Jonathan, even though the four years between them would never make them very close.

Jonathan has always been quiet, but around the boys he shows his sense of humor. When El started staying with the Byers more and more as Joyce and Hopper became more “official”, Jonathan took a special liking to El, and she to him. They understand being shy, and not feeling the need to say much. El loved how easy it was to just be around Jonathan—he didn’t make her feel like she had to say something, like most adults did. He gave her a mixtape for the first birthday she was able to celebrate with her found family, and El treasures it forever. She asks Mike how to make mix tapes so she can give one to Jonathan. This develops into a tradition between them of exchanging mix tapes constantly.

Max is closer with Steve than Jonathan—she just finds it easier to talk to Steve, while Jonathan’s silences made her uneasy at first,

much like El's had. But eventually she asks him about the music he listens to, after listening to one of the mix tapes he gave El. They bond over talking over song lyrics and sharing new rock, punk, and metal bands with each other.

I feel like the fandom has pretty much covered Steve's relationship with the kids. But I maintain the pre-s2 headcanon that Steve adopts Max more than any of the others. They both discover how much they love arcade games, and Steve drives her to the arcade all the time so she doesn't have to spend any more time around Billy than absolutely necessary. They'll spend hours at the arcade, Steve paying for most of it, and buying them candy or ice cream afterwards. Steve always has a great sense of pride and gratitude toward Max, for being smart enough to tranquilize her brother when Steve was within seconds of getting seriously concussed.

Steve also learns quickly that Max is way more athletic than any of the boys. When Max just wants to de-stress, she and Steve play basketball or baseball. El is sometimes with them, and though Steve isn't quite sure how to treat the "psychic" as he affectionately calls her sometimes, he feels sort of special that she trusts him enough to spend any time around him really. El warmed up to Steve faster than Mike or Lucas warmed up to Steve. Dustin of course told all of them how cool Steve was, and Lucas definitely admired him for how he fought the demodogs. But Steve noticed, since El hadn't been around for any of that, she just liked Steve for... Steve. Like Nancy and Jonathan, El didn't mind his cheesy jokes or rambling, and after Steve got over his initial nerves with El, he found she was really easy to be around. And she reminded him of Jonathan, someone who really helped Steve with his anxiety (yeah I hc Steve has anxiety, like me), by just being nonjudgmental and patient.

Steve learns D&D mainly through Dustin, and eventually Mike starts helping teach him too, after he realizes Nancy really is dating both Steve and Jonathan and he can't avoid Steve forever. It's not that Mike dislikes Steve, but he always remembered hearing about the fight between Steve and Jonathan in the alley, and Steve slut-shaming his sister. Steve understood Mike holding a grudge, and kept his distance until Mike gave him some indication he was ready to put the past behind them.

I imagine there are a lot of weekends that Steve starts his evenings hanging out with the party in the basement, making popcorn with El and Mike, going on candy and snack runs with Max, telling Lucas and Dustin about his job at the mechanics shop, answering their questions about how cars work. He's the coolest to the boys, the most trustworthy to Max, and he's one of the few adults that makes El laugh. So Mike couldn't hold his grudge forever.